OLD SPODE

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WITH FIFTY-SEVEN PLATES

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CHAPTER I

Old Spode
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Old Spode

In the Romance of Commerce none is more worthy to find a place than Josiah Spode, his son, and grandson, who with assurance, art, and enthusiasm founded and maintained the Ceramic Factory in Staffordshire from which so much that is beautiful and fine emanated. The manufacture of English porcelain in the eighteenth century owes to Josiah Wedgewood, and Josiah Spode, both Quakers, by the way, a debt that is not always recognised, for the improvements introduced by them exercised an influence in exalting their art which, advancing in excellence, has made British porcelain what it is to-day.

Josiah Spode, the elder, was born in 1733 and apprenticed when sixteen to Thomas Whieldon at Fenton, for three years, at a weekly wage of 2s. 3d., or 2s. 6d. "if he deserved it"! Apparently he did deserve it, for in February 1752 Whieldon hired him for a further seven months at 7s. 0d. a week. Spode worked two years for this wage, and in 1754, probably to celebrate his majority, he was given an additional sixpence a

week. This, however, must have been a somewhat inadequate income for a married man, even in those days, and Spode, having taken to himself a wife, and become proficient in his art, decided to start on his own account. He accordingly left Whieldon that year, and, at Stoke-on-Trent, began in a very small way to manufacture blue and white ware and coloured pottery.

For some years he occupied part of a building at Lane End (now Longton) with Robert Rankes, and John Turner, and when they dissolved partnership, in 1762, was doing well enough to warrant the acquisition of the whole premises. In 1767 he joined William Tomlinson, in partnership for a term of seven years, and in 1772 Thomas Mountford came to him "to learn the art of a Potter"; and with a capital of £500 they started China works at Shelton, Stoke-on-Trent. The drawings on account of profits do not appear excessive, Spode taking 12s. weekly, while Mountford had the use of the house at the factory, and four per cent. interest on his share of the capital (£250). Spode was also interested in his wife's business of a Haberdasher, carried on by her at Stoke.

This partnership in due time expired, and

Spode determined to start a branch in London, and in 1776 opened a warehouse in Fore Street, Cripplegate, where his son, who had lately married, went to live. From this time onward the business prospered and increased, so much so, that a larger building was taken in Portugal Street, Lincolns Inn, and the net profit averaged, some, £10,000 a year. This, for a man who started life at 2s. 3d. a week, is no mean achievement.

William Copeland then became the firm's representative in London; and, so successful was he that, in 1796, when the profits of the firm amounted for that year to £13,000, he was presented with the sum of £1,000 in recognition of his services.

Spode, senior, died suddenly in 1797, leaving his business to his son Josiah, who enhanced the reputation of their factory tremendously, and produced some of the most beautiful of its work.

There was another son of Josiah Spode, senior, named Samuel, and, although his father started him well by building him a factory at Lane Delph, called "The Foley," he was completely overshadowed by his more brilliant brother, Josiah, and soon dropped out of the business.

J. Spode the Second

Josiah Spode, the second, was born at Stoke-on-Trent in 1754, and received a liberal education. He was still young, however, when he began work at the factory, and went through every department learning thoroughly, from start to finish, the art and craft of a potter. He married in 1773, when only nineteen, a Miss Barker, the daughter of a neighbouring pottery manufacturer, and his father and father in-law were so impressed with his ability that it was decided to send him to the Metropolis to represent the firm when the first warehouse was opened there. Their belief in him was amply justified; his business capacity, allied to his comprehensive knowledge, and artistic gifts, soon advanced the fortunes of the family to an undreamt of extent, and he was made a partner before his father's death in 1797. Shortly after the death of his father, J. Spode, the second, took his son and William Copeland into partnership, the firm being called Spode, Son & Copeland.

It is to Josiah Spode, the second, that most of

the best work the factory produced, owes its origin. He it was who designed the beautiful patterns in gold scale, on blue ground, and gilt seaweed, and flowers, on gold ground that are perhaps unequalled by any other English factory. To him, also, the English manufacturers owe the introduction of bone ash into the porcelain mixture, in the right proportion, to make it bake with certainty and correctness.

What Josiah Spode, the second, did for English porcelain makers is just beginning to be known and is well summed up in the following remarks of Mr M. L. Solon in his history of Old English Porcelain, published in 1903. "His [Spode's] name could not occupy too high a place in the annals of the Staffordshire Potteries. Unlike so many improvements, which, after having been acclaimed and adopted, by all, live only long enough to be displaced by some other novelty, this ever-green bone china has remained unaltered since the first pieces of it came out of Spode's oven, and nothing indicates that it will be superseded for a long time to come."

"So widely did the new body differ from the old ones that it now forms an independent class in porcelain technology. Simple as the invention

may appear, since it consisted in a novel combination of well-known materials, if we consider the revolution that its introduction effected in the conditions of English manufacture, we must admit that the importance of that invention and the credit due to him who brought it into practice could never be over-rated."

These remarks, of course, only refer to Spode's bone china, and not to the Felspar Porcelain, which is, like Billingsley's "Swansea," in a class alone, and the production practically a lost art, for so jealous of his trade secrets, and knowledge, was Spode that he eventually destroyed many of the books containing them and even his workmen's names.

Nothing came amiss to this enthusiastic artist; not only did he originate beautiful work, but imitated, and, frequently, improved the productions of other factories. His "Japan Pattern," in imitation of Worcester, and Derby, designs far excels that of the Derby factory, and equals that of Worcester, whilst his own Japanese pattern, the celebrated No. 967, is unsurpassed as an English copy.

Fortunately an enormous amount of it was produced, so that it is not difficult to obtain

pieces to-day and judge of its charm and excellence.

When he died, on the 16th July 1827, Spode was one of the acknowledged master potters of his day. He amassed a large fortune, and controlled a great artistic business, and his career must ever be of the deepest interest to all who love and admire the work of representative English potters. He seems to have had some influence with the Government of the day; and his advice was evidently acted on by them, as the following entry in the *Gentleman's Magazine* shows:

"Aug. 28, 1811.

"On this date the Earthenware Manufacturers presented James Caldwell and Josiah Spode [the second] with two pieces of plate worth one hundred guineas each for their exertions in procuring the Government's abandonment of an intended tax on earthenware."

J. Spode the Third

Josiah Spode, the third, was born in 1776 at Fore Street, Cripplegate, and educated at the Grammar School, Newcastle-under-Lyme. He learned his business under his grandfather and continued in it till 1810. Unfortunately he lost his left arm in an accident with the machinery in 1803—a calamity indeed!—with the result that he took up farming on his estate at Fenton, and withdrew, somewhat, from active participation in the factory affairs. On his father's death, in 1827, he resumed superintendence of the Stoke works, in conjunction with William Taylor Copeland, son of William Copeland, who had died in 1826, but only for two years. He died on October 6th 1829, known far and wide for his benevolence and charity, and leaving a considerable fortune.

The remaining members of the family took little interest in the business; indeed, if report be true, they were rather ashamed of it, although it provided them with a very handsome income. One good lady, it is said, so twitted her husband

with the source of his wealth that one day in a fit of rage he smashed every bit of "Spode" in the house! Another relative used to buy up all and any pieces of the factory's work he came across, and destroy them! However, the last known member of the family in no way resembled his more immediate forebears in this respect; he was very proud of his connection with the business, and acquired a fine collection which, when sold after his death, realized high prices. He lived on the Marine Parade at Brighton, and was well known to the antique dealers there, delighting in talking to and discussing with them the merits and history of the Spode factory. A niece or grand-niece of the first Josiah Spode left a cabinet of specimens to the Victoria and Albert Museum, South Kensington, but, good though they are, they very inadequately represent the beautiful, and comprehensive, work of the Spode factory; and it is to be hoped that as time goes on, this will be remedied, as the value and importance of Spode china and ware is realized.

The surviving partner of the firm, William Taylor Copeland, an Alderman of the City of London, took Thomas Garrett into partnership on the 1st of March 1833, and the factory con-

tinued as "Copeland & Garrett late Spode" until 1847, when the partnership was dissolved. It was then carried on as "Copeland late Spode" till 1867, when it became "Copeland & Sons," and so continues to this day.